

## 2<sup>ND</sup> KINGS

### Week 35, chapters 22 and 23

We'll open this week in verse 14 of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 22. It is here that we learn of a female prophet named **Hulda**, and of King Josiah sending an embassy to her consisting of his royal court plus the High Priest for the purpose of making a dramatically important inquiry of God.

Even though Jeremiah and Zephaniah were the major prophets of this era, and Jeremiah was indeed active at the very time we're studying and was considered the chief prophet of Judah and therefore of King Josiah, we find Josiah insisting that this committee of his top aides seeks out **Hulda**. The ancient Hebrew sages speculate as to why this is, but more than likely it was little more than Jeremiah was somewhere else at the moment and King Josiah wanted an immediate answer to his inquiry.

Although the Talmud lists 7, only 3 women are named in the Scriptures as prophets: Miriam, Deborah and **Hulda**. **Hulda** is the only female prophet that the bible makes us aware of for the entire 400-year period of the Kings of Israel, beginning with King Saul and down through the last Hebrew King, Zedekiah. And the thing we should notice is that these 3 female prophets (biblical rarities) appeared during some of Israel's darkest days, and especially at times when men either failed badly in their roles as leaders, or generally refused to step forward and take hold of their God-given responsibilities, and so women were essentially pressed into service to take on what was a typical male role.

Little is known of **Hulda**. The Talmud (Jewish Tradition) says that she was descended from Joshua and Rahab. She was the wife of a great man, **Shallum**, who was one of the few bright spiritual lights of his generation. Some excellent scholars such as R.R. Wilson have re-constructed a family tree for **Shallum**, and it appears that he was the uncle of the prophet Jeremiah meaning **Hulda** was Jeremiah's aunt. That would help to explain how **Hulda** was such an accepted and revered prophet even though she was a female.

Tradition is that **Shallum** was in charge of the wardrobe (meaning all the holy vestments) of the Levitical Priesthood. This was anything but a menial task. **Shallum** would have been in charge of the handling of all the holy garments, as priests did not wear their priestly garments unless they were on duty. So they were issued their priests clothing at the beginning of their duty cycle, and then they turned them in for cleaning and care when their turn at serving at the Temple ended. And no doubt the priests' garb that they wore would then be handed out and used by other priests. No chance could be taken that these holy garments worn by the priests, some of whom actually entered into the Holy Sanctuary, might become defiled so they were carefully controlled.

Saying that **Shallum** was the keeper of the wardrobe means that he was in charge of the department, not the one who actually did the labor involved. So it was a high position of the greatest honor.

Let's re-read a small portion of 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 22.

### RE-READ 2<sup>ND</sup> KINGS 22: 14 to end

King Josiah and his royal court resided in the City of David while **Hulda** lived in Jerusalem. By now what had been two separate cities (separated only by perhaps four hundred yards) were thoroughly merged. The City of David was seen as more the royal and aristocratic compound and Jerusalem the place where the non-royal and less privileged citizens lived. **Hulda** lived in a section of Jerusalem called in Hebrew the **mishneh**. Since **mishneh** is a general word that usually means "the second", Hebrew and Christian bible scholars have had some difficulty trying to figure out what is intended in this context. This same designation is found in Zephaniah 1:10, used in the same way, so whatever was meant it was self-evident to the people of that day. The CJB translates it as Second Quarter, a more or less proper name for an identifiable (probably newer) section of an expanding Jerusalem. The Greek Septuagint (written around 250 B.C.) more or less agrees and gives the place the name Masena (notice the similarity to **Mishneh**).

However some Jewish sages say that this is actually speaking of a school, and so translate it as "study house" (this is easily the least likely of all the possibilities). But lately archeological finds have uncovered an extensive settlement on the Western Hill of Jerusalem enclosed by a somewhat separate city wall and it goes back to the days of Hezekiah (meaning the wall was in existence for about 75 years before Josiah's day). It is all but certain that this is the section of Jerusalem where **Hulda** lived and is here referred to as **Mishneh**.

So the group of 5 sent by King Josiah walks over to **Hulda's** residence and presents her with the urgent matter. And recall that the issue is that the Torah scroll that normally resided next to the Ark of the Covenant in the Temple had been hidden away someplace for so many years that its existence was all but forgotten. But during the refurbishment of the Temple a worker stumbled across the scroll, it was turned over to **Hilkiah** the High Priest, who then sent it to the King so he could know its contents. And when the Torah was read to him, he realized what it was, and that God's commandments were not being followed, and hadn't been followed for generations. But he became utterly terrified when the curses (the consequences) for trespassing against God's Torah commandments were read to him. Even so he wasn't exactly sure how this might affect him or his kingdom in this generation. Thus he rightly decided to immediately inquire of Yehoveh what this all meant, and so sought the services of a prophet.

Before we get to how **Hulda** responded, I'd like to point out that in my opinion we're seeing a replay of this pattern in our day, and interestingly it is not within Judaism but rather within God's ekklesia. It is at the core of the so-called Messianic and Hebrew Roots movements. And the gist of it is that many Believers in Jesus Christ have realized that Christianity has long ago thrown out the Old Testament, including the Torah, as a source of divine truth and thus it has

been judged as either inferior to the New Testament or no longer relevant to our faith. At the same time many have noticed a steady decline in the Church, morally and spiritually, a lack of solid teaching of the Word of God (it has been replaced with allegorical sermons that use a verse or two to validate some doctrinal or social position), and the establishment of a traditional belief that strictly obeying and doing the Word of God is tantamount to legalism.

Yet all over the world Christians who have a growing hunger for God and His Son Yeshua, and a longing to live out a meaningful life of faith and obedience have rediscovered the Torah as a needed foundation, and perhaps the missing link, for our walk with Messiah. It is serving to expose long held manmade doctrines as poor substitutes (to say it mildly) for the written divine biblical commandments of God. I confess that my first reaction, and I know the reaction of many that begin to study the Torah, is one of unease or even great alarm. It is because we suddenly realize, as Josiah did, that we have not been obedient to the Lord, we have been trespassing and sinning in the most gross ways without fully realizing or acknowledging it, and that there are serious repercussions for it. But the \$64,000 question among Messianics and Hebrew Roots folks always is: how does the rediscovered Torah apply to our lives and our circumstances, in a time and in a society so far removed from when it was written? Which laws and commands should we follow, and which ones are simply expressions of ancient cultural customs and ought to be taken as principles but not necessarily obeyed literally? This was Josiah's challenge, too, as he was the first Hebrew leader in a very long time to take the matter seriously. Tradition, custom, and ritual mixed with paganism had taken the place of the Torah commandments, but people didn't realize it and didn't question it. They thought they were being pious and righteous and pleasing to God.

The Torah was old news in Josiah's day, having been handed down from on High to Moses 7 or 8 centuries earlier, to the point that by now the people and their leadership had lost interest. Think about it: what relevance might we see to our 21<sup>st</sup> century lives in a document written to an ancient culture in 1200 or 1300 A.D. somewhere in Europe? Even our 250 year old American Constitution is now viewed skeptically by many who see it (in many instances) as too old to be relevant to a modern enlightened society. That is somewhat how it must have felt to Josiah's Jewish society when the Torah Scroll was unearthed in the Temple repair project and read. But as a footnote, isn't it ironic that Christians today generally have no problem accepting an 1800 year old New Testament written by Hebrews but in an ancient Greek dialect, as modern enough and relevant enough to follow; yet a 3400 year old document (the Torah) written by Hebrews, in Hebrew, is a bit too ancient and too irrelevant to follow. Go figure.

**Hulda's** prophetic oracle begins in verse 15 and it is shocking to say the least. It is not hard to imagine the stunned men standing silent as she begins by saying, "Say to the **man** who sent you...." Bible scholars note the strange remark of saying "the man", when she fully understood it was King Josiah who sent these men to her. The Rabbis say that she was being blatantly disrespectful to the king. However there can be little doubt that **Hulda** and her husband **Shallum** were ardent supporters of Josiah and agreed with his determination to reform Judah and Temple worship, so this must have a higher meaning. C. F. Kiel, that great 19<sup>th</sup> century bible commentator, says that **Huldah** made use of the expression "the man" because the oracle she was about to give applied not just to the king but to every one who

would pay attention to it. This contrasts with verse 18 when the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of the oracle applies only to the king himself; there she says, “And concerning the King of Judah who sent you to inquire.....”

Essentially **Huldah** validated the fears that **Melech Yoshiyahu** expressed, and that indeed God’s wrath against Judah was already a decided in matter in heaven, as it soon would be on earth. On account of their idolatry all of Judah and Jerusalem would pay the price, and no amount of repentance will change the Lord’s mind. Death, destruction, and exile were now a scheduled certainty. A line had been crossed and there is no longer hope.

Here’s the thing to grasp: we’ve discussed before how leaders of congregations (and nations) bear great responsibility for that group’s actions and mindsets. Yet, the group itself cannot point to the leader, say that their actions and their mindsets are his fault, and shift the accountability to one man. Thus we see something that Jeremiah spent much time prophesying about: the rotten inner core of the people of Judah. Through Josiah’s reforms, many of the pagan altars and abominable worship practices had been destroyed. The Temple had been cleansed and the Priesthood was again functioning more like it should. And so the people, under penalty of law, generally obeyed King Josiah’s edicts and outwardly seemed to be on the right track.

But it was all a mirage. The common citizen’s heart was far from God. They talked the talk; they even seemed to walk the walk. But inside, their hearts were corrupted beyond repair. Their idolatry had become so ingrained that the thought of accepting their wrong and changing their minds couldn’t advance. Over the preceding decades many pagan practices had become Hebrew-ized and declared holy and then held up to God as worship to Him. Even when the Prophets told them of the error of their ways, and the people were told that so much of what they did was pagan in origin, they may have stopped it publicly but they continued on in secret. Or they obeyed the king so as not to be punished, but they longed to hang on to the things that they felt so good about even though from God’s perspective these things were evil.

It is well understood even by secular scholars who study the bible as merely an example of ancient Hebrew literature that the reason given for many of God’s commandments in the Torah was to counter the behavior of the Canaanites. If the Canaanites shaved and had smooth faces then Hebrew men should have full beards. If the Canaanites had no sideburns, the Hebrew men should. If the Canaanite women wore their hair long and disheveled, then Hebrew women should wear their hair neat and tidy. If the Canaanites tattooed themselves, the Hebrews should not decorate their skin. If the Canaanites used metal and wood images of their gods, then the Hebrews should use no images at all. The idea was that the Hebrews inward change should reflect an outward distinction from those whose land was being taken from them because of their wickedness (the Canaanites) and being turned over to God’s chosen people (the Israelites) because of their redemption. Or put another way: the outward differences of the Israelites in clothing, personal grooming, diet, religious ritual, circumcision, and holiday observances were to be visible symbols of their invisible and set-apart spiritual status.

Yet God knows every human’s heart and no amount of outward symbols or behavior can

paper over, disguise and hide a person's wicked and unclean heart from Him.

This would be a good time for us to hear from the foremost prophet of that era, Jeremiah. He has a lot to say about the spiritual condition of the people of Judah, even though to themselves the Judahites felt that they were in good stead with the Lord. This is a somewhat long chapter, and I would like to ask you to put your bibles down; do NOT follow along and do NOT to turn to this passage. I would prefer that you listen carefully to God's Word in order to understand that while this word originally was meant to speak to Judah and to the few who remained in the land from the 10 northern tribes; this is also speaking to those of us who are also God's people by means of faith in Christ. This was not a word of divine warning to pagans, but rather to those who considered themselves as worshippers of the God of Israel. Please; don't turn off to it like the people of Jeremiah's time did.

### **READ JEREMIAH CHAPTER 2 all**

I could spend a couple of lessons only in this chapter, but for your sake I'll resist. So I'll merely summarize. The Lord says to His people that He remembers when at first you were devoted to Him, and at first you followed Him without question. But soon, you began to pull away. You began to give your attention to things in life that are "nothings". The people didn't inquire after God any longer. God had given you abundance and now your perceived need for Him has diminished. Even the institutional religious leaders at the highest level (the priests) stopped inquiring after God. Those leaders who were the keepers and teachers of the bible (the Torah) didn't even know Him (says verse 8), although they must have thought they did. Those who God at one time called His prophets rebelled and began prophesying in Ba'al's name instead.

Then the Father presents His case against His people. He says (in verse 11) who has ever heard of such a thing that a nation of people exchanged their gods for a different set of gods? But for Israel to do so was for them to exchange the real and living God for a bunch of idols that were no gods at all! They exchanged God's glory for the things they put value in, but in fact these things were worthless.

And then says the Lord in verse 17: you brought this upon yourself by abandoning God. And yet (in verse 23) the people deny it. They say, no, I am not defiled. I haven't pursued the false gods. God says in verse 25, OK now that I've told you what is wrong, STOP IT! But you say, "No, I love these things and I'm going after them". There is nothing wrong in what I do, what I observe, what I believe.

The people who call themselves by God's name have actually put their trust in material things and in human philosophies. In verse 17, they say to a wooden log, "You are my father". They say to a piece of stone, "You are my mother" (wood and stone are what the idols they worshipped were made from). And then when trouble comes they put their hope in all of these material things, and in these pieces of stone and wood, and in all of these false beliefs they've set up for themselves, and they are shocked when none of this saves them.

Why are you arguing with Me about it, says the Lord, you have all rebelled against Me. Admit

it. Own up to it. Verse 30: But “You will not receive My correction”. Verse 31: “You say we’re free to roam” (translation, we have freedom in our redemption to use God’s name and then go wherever our hearts lead us because God would never punish us because we’re His redeemed people).

Then in verse 35 are those words no one wants to hear: Here, I am passing sentence on you **because you say**, I have done nothing wrong. In other words, over and over God warns, chastises, and disciplines His people but we say that none of this applies to us. My heart is better than yours, so I can follow my heart and disobey God’s commandments and in many ways that is actually a better thing. I am redeemed so I can incorporate anything I want to in my worship, my everyday life, my religious celebrations, and God would never punish me for it. I am rule-free and nothing can touch me.

I hope you had the ears to hear this, and didn’t lose focus. Sadly, Judah did not. Yeshua made the same type of indictment almost 700 years later specifically against His church in Revelation chapters 1-4 (go home and read it at one sitting; it won’t take you but 20 or 30 minutes).

Back to 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 22. In verse 18 King Josiah’s personal devotion to Yehoveh is taken into account. **Huldah** goes on to praise the king, and says that the Lord has decided that because Josiah has a soft heart, and because he has done his level best to rid his kingdom of all the defilement, sin, and confusion brought on by the previous regimes of wicked kings, he would not have to observe, nor would he fall victim to, the coming national catastrophe (the exile to Babylon). The Rabbis point out that King Josiah must have been greatly pained by the realization that these people whose welfare he was devoted to, were going to experience a horror they were unprepared for. But the Lord, in His mercy, would postpone the event until Josiah was dead and he wouldn’t have to personally witness it.

Verse 20 causes many bible scholars and teachers a problem, because in their view this prophetic promise to Josiah was not kept. Here we read that he is promised that he will be gathered to his forefathers in peace; however later we will read that he was violently killed in battle at Megiddo. How can we reconcile this? Actually the matter isn’t difficult at all, and we’ll address that when we get to it. For now let’s move on to 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 23.

This is a very long chapter and we’ll just read a few verses to get started today, and then get further into it next week.

### **READ 2<sup>ND</sup> KINGS 23:1 – 19**

This is the story of a nationwide revival movement led by King Josiah and along with it yet another decisive move by his royal government against apostasy and idolatry. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 34 we read that in his 12th year as King of Judah he broke down the altars to Ba’al, the monuments to the sun god were demolished, sacred poles and carved images ground to powder, and he killed the priests who led the people to worship these things, burning even their skeletal remains upon the same pagan altars that they had sacrificed to the false gods. So what we are reading about in this chapter took place 6 years later in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of his reign.

Even though the king was told in the most definite terms by **Hulda's** message that Judah was doomed, he wouldn't rest content until he did all he could to bring the people of his kingdom to a right place with the God of Israel. Did he not believe the prophecy, that this was a done deal, and no amount of change at this point would help? Perhaps he remembered when Isaiah told Hezekiah that he would surely die; but Hezekiah prayed and the Lord relented and allowed him to survive his illness. Nonetheless King **Yoshiyahu** refused to give up even knowing the probable outcome. And I think this is a great example of a motto that my father used to quote to me in my teenage years: do what is right and let the chips fall where they may. In other words, the goal ought not to be reward for our righteous behavior, but rather the goal ought to be to live out however many or few days we have to the glory of God. The outcome is for Him to decide.

Unlike 6 years earlier when he simply issued royal edicts to end idolatry in his kingdom, this time Josiah began his new purge by calling the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem to join him at the Temple for a solemn ceremony. Along with elders, other leading men, as well as the priests, the prophets, and as many of the common people of Judah who would come, the whole kingdom was bid to attend and to hear the reading of the rediscovered Torah scroll. As sad as it is to report, these may be the first actual words of Holy Scripture that the nation had heard in scores of years, if not more. The 2<sup>nd</sup> verse calls what was read the **sepher B'rit**, the Book of the Covenant. So if this term is intended to be precise and is not just another general name for the 5 Books of Moses, the Torah, then what was going to be read to the crowd was indeed the Law: that which was given to Moses on Mt. Sinai as the Law Code that Israel was to live by. And since the point of the convocation was for the people of Judah to learn God's actual regulations and commandments, as opposed to a series of manmade doctrines that they had gone by for decade after decade, then it would necessarily be the Law of Moses that they would need to hear.

Further, in a scene reminiscent of Mt. Sinai after Moses presented the Covenant to the people, all in attendance acknowledged their acceptance of its terms and conditions. And we should not overlook the words that King Josiah spoke to pledge himself and his people to obey these commandments that it would be with all their being and with all their hearts.

Let me end today's lesson by saying that the Rabbis have gone to great length to make it clear that this wasn't a new covenant that was being instituted by Josiah in the sense that it was something that had never existed before. It was also not a revised covenant. Rather this was a renewed covenant. It was the same old covenant made new again after sitting on the shelf for so long. And I will tell you that this is exactly how we ought to regard that which the Church calls the New Covenant or the New Covenant in Christ. It is a renewed covenant. It is only new in the sense that the blood needed to validate it was provided by the Son of God, and He also became its mediator. And membership to the covenant along with its saving benefits became extended to people, gentiles, outside of national Israel. It is the same covenant that Moses first received, and that King Josiah and Judah just agreed to follow in a rededication ceremony.

We'll continue with this chapter next week.